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This, then, I take it, is the chief obstacle in the way of the bold man who has started a paper in England, if he endeavors to gather his news in the prevalent American fashion. As to the relative values of the two systems of news-gathering—the English, which trusts simply to official sources, and gives the bare facts in all unimportant cases, and the American, which is based on the principle that, under the most apparently commonplace statement may lurk a world of interesting detail, only to be learned by close questioning of all concerned—I shall offer no opinion. I can only say that it seems to me to be a question of news or no news, with the odds in favor of the former.

HORACE TOWNSEND.

V.

TURKISH FREETHINKERS.

THE progress of free thought is not altogether confined to the lands of the North-Caucasian nations. In the cities of Japan, the name of a Buddhist zealot has become a by-word, as odious as "Jesuit" in its latter-day significance, and the private creed of educated Turks is generally a vague theism, strongly tinged with agnosticism. In the bookstores of Constantinople, skepticism in its most pronounced types forms the staple of conversation. The Padisha himself (like Mohammed the Second and the Caliph Al Motadi) is well known to be a rationalist; and a correspondent of the *Pesther Lloyd* describes a soirée at the residence of a Syrian pacha who entertained his guests with anecdotes à la Mary Montagu, quizzing the ulemas and the superstitions of the orthodox peasantry. *Meshdàn*—literally an epileptic, a person gaining influence by pretended fits of religious ecstasy—is a sort of freemasonry term which an investigator found to apply to no less a personage than the Prophet himself, and which metropolitan Moslems often use with a chuckling irreverence that would delight the soul of Colonel Ingersoll. "If Mufti Meshdàn had revealed the secret of breech-loading six-shooters, instead of his ordinance of six daily prayers," remarked the impious Syrian, "we could still smoke our pipes on the ramparts of Buda, and probably on the Alcazar of Toledo."

A. L. FRANCIS.

VI.

GEOGRAPHICAL DELUSIONS.

THERE is a story of a Spanish artist who decorated the church of his native town with a fresco, depicting the "Siege of Jerusalem," and exhibiting the camp of a Roman army with a battery of heavy siege-guns. That anachronism, however, is matched by the blunder of numerous modern painters, who insist on representing the landscapes of biblical and classic geography with long ranges of treeless mountain-chains; for there is no doubt that up to the beginning of our chronological era the coast-lands of the Mediterranean were covered with magnificent forests. The writings of the ancient classics abound with allusions to the "sylvan solitudes of Arcadia," the "wild beasts of the Numidian forests," the "shaggy woods of Mount Ætna," and the "wood-covered slopes of the Apulian highlands" (the southern Apennines). The Bible speaks of the woods of Bashan and Lebanon, of sacred groves in the land of the Canaanitish idolaters; and even southern Syria teemed with cities and hamlets that can have supported their inhabitants only on a basis of abundant vegetation. The Hebrew synonym of "desert," indeed, means a "wilderness," rather than a sand-waste; and in western Asia and northern Africa, vast territories, now as void of life as the lava-fields of the moon, were once as fertile as the garden-lands of our southern Alleghanies.

The author of "Exile Life in Siberia" has exploded an idea that Asiatic Russia is nothing but a snow-covered steppe; but the "Dying Continent," too, deserves a better opinion. According to the estimates of Professor Bassières, of the Belgian exploring party, Western Africa, south of Lake Tschad, still contains more than a million square miles of almost continuous forests, not to mention the park-like hill-country